

Meeting Notes
Tenant Work Group
Tuesday, April 7, 2009
6:30-8:30pm
Executive Conference Room
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850

Work Group Members in attendance: Matt Losak (Chair), Maureen Ross, Guy Johnson, Rick Nelson, Harrietta Kelly, Chuck Short, Dale Tibbitts

Via Conference Call: Parag Khandhar, Dawn Wunderle

Staff participants: Megan Moriarty, IMPACT Silver Spring; Debbie Spielberg, County Council.

Agenda

- Review of previous meeting's minutes
- Debrief 3/30 public meeting
- Discuss upcoming public meetings
- Update on survey
- Senior Committee work plan
- Committee reports
- Planning for code review meeting
- Work plan reports
- Other business
- Public Comment

Notes:

Matt Losak called the meeting to order at 6:30pm. The previous meeting's minutes were reviewed and approved. Megan will add Dale's name to the notes from the March 30 meeting.

The group then discussed the public meeting held at the East County Regional Center on March 30. Matt mentioned that while the meeting went well, the group needs to make sure to do more outreach and increase attendance. Chuck Short questioned whether these meetings are the right tool to gather input and suggested smaller, more focused outreach. Megan will check on prices for ads in the Gazette. Rick suggested having a Gazette reporter write a story about the past meetings and the upcoming ones as well. Chuck recommended having a Washington Post reporter do a story since the Gazette reporters cover different parts of the County. Parag Khandhar is reaching out to ethnic media, letting them know about work group and the public meetings. Megan will take the names out of the public meeting minutes. The group members agreed to refrain from asking questions at the next meetings.

Felicia asked about having meetings in Bethesda/Rockville and/or Silver Spring/Wheaton. Megan explained that with only four meetings, the group cannot cover all areas of the County. Chuck described his idea about conducting informal focus groups in apartment

buildings. Specific suggestions for outreach should be sent to Megan before the next meeting (April 28), so these meetings can be held as soon as possible.

The group then discussed the work group's schedule. Rick reported that IMPACT's contract had to be extended for six months and cannot be extended again. Since the committee work plans go into May and once those are finished then the group can begin synthesizing information. Chuck wants the group to finish the report by Sept. 1.

Next, Matt gave an update on the survey. Data from municipalities will not impact the survey in any substantial way (whether it is included or not). The survey committee will compile a list of possible questions, send them to the group for their input and then be sent to the surveyors to be turned into appropriate questions.

The group then heard updates from each committee:

Committee 4: Seniors and Special Needs

Maureen presented the Senior and Special Populations Committee's work plan. The group will meet next week and try to focus on issues that are specific to seniors. The main issues to be reviewed are as follows: rising rents and utility costs, safety in the building, transportation, choice of cable providers, laws and/or regulations governing senior-only housing.

Harrietta Kelly suggested researching a voucher programs for seniors, which Rick clarified was probably the waiting list for seniors that they just re-opened. Chuck suggested that Maureen attend the next Commission on Aging and Commission for Persons with Disabilities' meetings to get their thoughts on senior rental housing. Also, Chuck suggested the committee research what are other jurisdictions doing, which Maureen agreed they would do. The group agreed the committee should not focus too much time on the issues associated with moving into assisted living facilities since many groups are already working on that issue. The committee will do more research, hold a focus group and reach out to service providers, like Top Banana, that can provide data.

Chuck reiterated that this report needs to put ideas on the table, not solve all the problems. For example, he thought of a system of assisted accessory apartment living. Maureen will send out a plan with specific tasks and assignments by April 13.

Committee 1: Tenant Security and Affordability

Guy presented an updated work plan (with different formatting options) and explained there will be footnoting throughout the document, rather than a bibliography. Matt preferred the bullet point format with the legal details in an appendix. The group agreed a common format for all committees would be: issue, findings, recommendations.

Chuck proposed the group focus on introducing a number of ideas in the final report and then focus on three achievable recommendations or propose a legislative agenda for 2010 with 5-7 specific bills.

Committee 2: Code Update and Enforcement

Dale explained the committee is waiting for legislative session to end and will be ready to move ahead by the next meeting.

Committee 3: Landlord-Tenant Communication and Tenant Advocacy

Dawn Wunderle explained the group has finished work for March tasks, but are behind on April. They will meet to update their report, organize the information and email it out to group.

The code review session with Nowelle Ghahhari, County Attorney, will happen at the next meeting on April 28. It will not be a public meeting, but invited guests may attend as silent participants. The group agreed the presentation should include: landlord-tenant code, building code and code enforcement. Rick will invite a member of the Code Enforcement staff to attend as well. Rick will work with Nowelle to come up with an appropriate presentation: hit the highlights, common misperceptions, how do you get an answer to questions. The deadline to send questions for Nowelle to Rick (copying Megan) is Apr. 17. Group members should review the code and/or the Landlord-Tenant handbook before the next meeting. The meeting will also include 30 minutes for committee updates.

Chuck suggested the group also solicit their suggestions on how to fix the code. Debbie asked about the requirements for what landlords tell tenants and how renters are informed of existing laws. Felicia presented a list of what issues she hears from tenants repeatedly and what they should discuss with landlords/others before signing a lease: security deposit, month-to-month, Board of Election information, tenant association, penalties for breaking the lease or moving out early, rent increases, retaliation. Ideas for renter education discussed included: web information, renter orientation, list of what has to be covered by landlords/managers at lease signing. Dawn said there is a fine line between too much and not enough information and most important is to give renters resources so they can find information.

In other business, Megan handed out copies of the comments from the website. She will pass along these emails to the work group periodically. The group agreed to respond to all comments, at least to acknowledge receipt. The next work group meetings were set for: May 12, May 26

Matt adjourned the meeting at 8:15pm.

Upcoming Work Group Meetings:

Tuesday, April 28, 6:30pm, County Executive's conference room

Tuesday, May 12, 6:30pm, County Executive's conference room

Tuesday, May 26, 6:30pm, County Executive's conference room

Public Meetings:

Thursday, April 23, 7:00pm, Upcounty Regional Center

Tuesday, May 5, 7:00pm, Long Branch Community Center